United States
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Pacific
Southwest
Region

Record of Decision

Eldorado National Forest
Land and Resource Management Plan

COVER SHEET

Record of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement
Land and Resource Management Plan

Eldorado National Forest
USDA Forest Service

El Dorado, Placer, Amador, Alpine Counties, California

This document presents the decision regarding the selection of a land and resource management plan for the national forest land within the Eldorado National Forest. It summarizes the reasons for choosing Alternative A as the basis for the Forest Plan which will be followed for the next 10 to 15 years. Estimates of the long-term environmental and economic consequences contained in the Environmental Impact Statement were considered in the decision.

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USDA-Forest Service

Final Environmental Impact Statement
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El Dorado, Placer, Amador, and Alpine Counties, California

I. The Decision

A. FEIS Alternative A as a Basis for the Forest Plan

Based on a thorough study of the resources of the Eldorado National Forest (the Forest), detailed analysis of seven alternatives, and review of public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Plan, I have selected Alternative A to provide direction for management activities on the Forest for the next ten to fifteen years. Alternative A is described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Final Plan. This record of decision summarizes the principal management objectives of the Forest Plan and the rationale for my decision.

B. Overview

After almost 80 years of multiple-use management by the USDA Forest Service (FS), the Eldorado National Forest is an environmentally sound and highly productive forest that contributes to the social, economic and environmental needs of society. The Forest Plan will continue the implementation of the multiple-use management concept. The Forest Plan will also maintain and improve the quality and, where possible, the productivity of Forest resources.

Over time, the appearance of the Forest as seen from local communities, major highways, and high use recreation areas will remain essentially the same as today. Productive timberlands will contain uneven and even-aged stands, scattered among more natural-appearing areas. Wildlife habitat will generally be more diverse than that which currently exists. Viable populations of existing wildlife populations will be present. Recreational opportunities will increase and additional acres are recommended for inclusion in the national wilderness system.

C. Summary of the Major Provisions of the Forest Plan

The Plan provides a balanced management program that increases utilization of some market resources, maintains or enhances amenity values, and minimizes or avoids adverse environmental impacts. The following summarizes key management direction and goals to be achieved over the ten to fifteen year period of Plan implementation.

Recreation

The quality of developed and dispersed recreation will increase as the Forest is managed at higher standards of maintenance. Dispersed and developed recreation opportunities will increase as investments increase for new site construction, reconstruction of existing sites, and trailhead facility construction. Trail mileage, including both motorized and non-motorized, will increase by 330 miles in the first decade.

There are four existing developed winter sport sites that have the potential for expansion: Echo Summit, Sierra Ski Ranch, Kirkwood Meadows, and Iron Mountain. In addition to the existing sites, the Huckleberry area has been identified as having characteristics which make it suitable for downhill skiing. Decisions to allow or deny expansion or new development will be considered through master development plans and accompanying environmental analysis.

A major change for off-road vehicle (ORV) management is provided for in the Forest Plan and will be reflected in the new Forest ORV Plan. ORV use will be restricted to designated roads and trails with provisions for designation of specific open areas. Designation of open areas will be based on subsequent site-specific environmental analysis.

Forest Plan implementation will include the development of a new Forest ORV Plan. This ORV Plan will designate a road and trail system and contain management direction from the Forest Plan. The ORV Plan will be completed by January 1990 and implemented at that time. Until then, the existing ORV Plan will remain in effect. There will be specific area closures needed in order to implement the Forest Plan and meet certain management objectives. Examples of these closures include Research Natural Areas, Special Interest Areas and primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized High Country. Specific closures will be decided on a case-by-case basis and will be executed by Forest Supervisor order.

Timber

The Plan shows 307,615 acres of suitable timber lands on the Forest. Timber harvest from regulated stands may decrease slightly from current levels, 138.3 million board feet (MMBF), down to 137.2 MMBF. This projected volume results from a combination of both even-aged and uneven-aged harvest systems. The Plan has 4,300 acres of reforestation, 2,500 acres of precommercial thinning, and 2,500 acres of plantation release programmed for annual accomplishment during the 10-year period.

Selection of silvicultural methods will be based on analysis of vegetation type, topography, other specific site conditions, and public input. Clearcutting may be used on about 2,100 acres annually. Clearcutting may be used where this method meets management objectives better than shelterwood or selection harvest. Reasons for selecting clearcutting as the optimum method of harvest include:

1. Less ground disturbance will occur by harvesting more volume in fewer acres as compared to partial cutting a greater number of acres. Watershed objectives will be better met because harvesting more volume per acre means that fewer acres are affected.

2. Fewer residual trees will be damaged, which is particularly important for true fir stands.

3. Clearcutting makes possible more efficient and complete cleanup of logging slash to reduce fire hazard and facilitates planting for the reestablishment of timber stands.

4. Infections from dwarf mistletoe spread less quickly in young stands of trees planted in clearcuts.

5. Regeneration and growth rates are higher for shade-intolerant species such as pines and Douglas-fir when planted in clearcut areas, and within clearcut areas they better withstand invasion by the less valuable shade-tolerant trees such as true firs and incense cedar. Some encroachment of these shade tolerant species will occur, but the shade-intolerant species will predominate.

Riparian Areas

Riparian areas on the Forest will be managed to emphasize riparian- dependent resources and water quality objectives. The Plan provides for Streamside Management Zones (SMZ) which extend the area of protection adjacent to riparian zones. The SMZ varies in width relative to the class of stream and stability of adjacent lands. Land disturbance will be minimized in this area. A program is included in the Plan to restore riparian areas where the need for improvement exists.

Fire and Fuels Management

A balanced fire program exists in the Plan and provides the opportunity to minimize wildfire losses. A program of prevention, detection, suppression, and fuels management will provide for public safety and meeting resource objectives. Increased emphasis is placed on natural and activity fuels management. Fire suppression will include a combination of confinement, containment, and control strategies in order to meet resource objectives while minimizing costs.

Water Quality and Quantity

The Plan emphasizes the attainment of water quality and the increase of water quantity where opportunities exist. Water quality will be maintained and/or improved by adherence to Section 208 Best Management Practices, establishment of the Streamside Management Zones, and constraints on cumulative watershed disturbance. Restoration of watersheds will continue to receive high priority. Quantity will be increased with certain vegetative management practices, including snowpack management. These practices will provide an increase in quantity and alter the timing of runoff for delivery at more opportune times.

Research Natural Areas (RNA's)

Two candidate RNA's are recommended for establishment by the Chief of the Forest Service. These are Peavine and Station Creek. RNA's will be maintained in a natural condition and use of the areas will be limited to nondestructive and nonmanipulative activities. Until a final decision regarding designation is made by the Chief, these areas will be managed to maintain the attributes for which they were nominated. Two other areas, Snow Canyon and Middle Mountain, are nominated to the Regional RNA Committee for RNA status and will receive further evaluation.

Special Areas

Nine Special Interest Areas are established. These include Big Crater Geological, Little Crater Geological, Traverse Creek Botanical, Round Top Botanical/ Geological, Pyramid Creek Geological, Wrights Lake Bog Botanical/Geological, Rock Creek Botanical/Geological, Leonardi Falls Botanical, and Mokelumne Archeological areas. Special interest areas will be managed principally for the values that qualify them for designation. Activities within them, if any, will be designed to preserve their special interest features.

Two candidate National Recreation Trails are established. These are Pony Express Trail (26 miles) and Rubicon Springs ORV Trail (6 miles).

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Rubicon River is recommended to the Chief for further consideration regarding Wild and Scenic River designation by Congress. Until a final decision is made regarding designation, this river will receive protection of its scenic values through the application of a Scenic River management prescription.

The North Fork of the Mokelumne, above Salt Springs Reservoir, is also being studied by the Stanislaus to determine if it is eligible for designation as a wild, scenic or recreation river and if eligible, is it suitable for designation. The decision regarding the recommendation for designation, if any, will be included in the Forest Plan for the Stanislaus National Forest. The portion of the North Fork of the Mokelumne River within the Eldorado NF will be managed to protect its values until the final decision is made. This protection will come from application of a wilderness management prescription. If the Congressional decision does not provide for designation as a Wild River, the area will continue to be managed as part of the Mokelumne Wilderness.

Two other National Park Service inventoried rivers, the North and Middle Forks of the Cosumnes, were found to be eligible for Recreation Rivers. However, they are not recommended for designation in order to maintain their availability to meet the water needs of local municipalities. These rivers will be managed under the Streamside Management Zone prescriptions to protect their riparian values.

The North Fork of the Mokelumne, from below Salt Springs Reservoir to Tiger Creek Reservoir, has been determined to be eligible for inclusion in the National System. A ten mile segment is eligible for a "recreation" classification and another 7 miles is eligible for a "wild" classification. A suitability study will be conducted, within one year, to determine whether a recommendation for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River system should be made.

Further Planning and Roadless Areas

Nine roadless areas were evaluated in RARE II which was a roadless area review and evaluation completed in January 1979. The Plan provides the following direction for these areas.

1. Caples Creek Area - The 1984 California Wilderness Bill designated the Caples Creek roadless area as a "Further Planning Area." Of the 17,340 acres in this area, the Plan recommends 13,694 acres for Wilderness designation. The remainder of the area will be managed for other multiple use activities including timber harvest and ORV use. The wilderness character of the area recommended for wilderness will be maintained until a final decision regarding this recommendation is made by Congress.

2. Salt Springs Area - The 1984 California Wilderness Bill added 1,820 acres of this Area to the Mokelumne Wilderness. The remaining 20 acres will be maintained in a roadless condition and will be managed to emphasize semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation.

3. Raymond Peak Area - The 1984 California Wilderness Bill added 10,703 acres to the Mokelumne Wilderness. The remaining 1,800 acres will be managed as High Country with an emphasis on nonmotorized and motorized recreation-oriented prescriptions.

4. Rubicon Area - The 5,100 acres within this area are included in the Rubicon Wild and Scenic River recommendation and is managed under the Wild and Scenic River Prescription.

5. Pyramid Area - Approximately 13,000 acres of this area will continue to be managed in a roadless condition with management prescriptions for semiprimitive nonmotorized use or General Forest maintenance. The remaining 10,500 acres are within management areas that allow for road construction, timber harvest, and motorized recreation.

6. Poison Hole Area - The size of this area is 1,500 acres. Maintenance of a roadless condition will occur on 653 acres with application of management prescriptions for primitive or semiprimitive nonmotorized High Country or General Forest maintenance. Activities that provide for motorized recreation will occur on 740 acres, and timber harvest and road construction will be allowed on 103 acres of this area.

7. Fawn Lake Area - The entire 1,100 acres of this area will be managed as Semiprimitive Motorized High Country.

8. Dardenelles Area - This area is 8,000 acres in size. Approximately 2,800 acres will retain roadless character with semiprimitive nonmotorized High Country or General Forest maintenance prescriptions. Semiprimitive Motorized and Roaded Natural High Country management will occur on 4,676 acres. Expansion of a winter sports area will be considered on 507 acres and 15 acres are available for timber harvest.

9. Tragedy Elephants Back Area - The 1984 California Wilderness Bill included 5,845 acres of this area in the Mokelumne Wilderness. Of the remaining area, 7,433 acres will be managed in a roadless condition, 12,642 acres will be managed as Semiprimitive Motorized and Roaded Natural High Country, and 1,256 acres will be considered for a winter sports area expansion.

Fisheries

Fisheries habitat improvements are provided for by Standards and Guidelines in the Plan. These include both structural improvements such as log weirs and nonstructural improvements such as willow plantings. The habitat improvements, combined with riparian and SMZ protection, will result in increased pounds of trout in Forest streams. Programs to increase the use of Forest fisheries will be promoted.

Wildlife

Opportunities to protect and enhance wildlife habitat are recognized in the Plan. The Plan provides for bald eagle habitat protection and introduction of two peregrine falcons. There will be 32 designated spotted owl habitat areas but total estimated habitat capability will remain for approximately 73 pairs at the end of the Plan period. Within the designated areas, a "no-timber harvest" prescription will apply on 24 of the Spotted Owl Habitat Areas (SOHA's) and 8 areas will be managed with a even-aged or uneven-aged timber harvest prescription.

Mule deer habitat will be enhanced with habitat improvement projects such as planting of browse species or improvement of habitat thru natural fuel treatments. Consideration will be given to habitat needs for all wildlife species during project planning and analysis.

Lands

The land adjustment program will be aimed at maintaining or improving the land base with lands of high recreational and timber values. Acquisition of lands within Special Areas and Wild and Scenic River corridors will be emphasized. Rights-of-way acquisition and landline location will increase to reflect additional "front country" trail construction. The possibility of a trans-

Sierra transportation and utility corridor was analyzed but the Forest Plan does not provide for creation of such a corridor.

Minerals

Emphasis in the Plan is placed on timely processing of mineral exploration and development proposals. Improvement of practices to protect surface resources, compatible with exploration and extraction of mineral resources, will also be emphasized.

Range

Livestock grazing will continue at about the current level. Approximately 13,800 animal-unit-months (grazing by a 1,000 pound cow or the equivalent for one month) will be permitted annually. No new allotments are proposed.

Soils

Maintenance of long-term soil productivity is given a high priority in the Plan. Minimizing reduction in long-term productivity from erosion, nutrient loss, displacement, and compaction are emphasized. Provisions are made for rehabilitation and improvement measures where needed.

Visual

Landscapes with an unmodified natural appearance will continue to exist in wilderness, unroaded areas in the high country, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Research Natural Areas and most Special Areas. Foreground zones seen from major travel routes, reservoirs, developed recreation sites, and most major dispersed recreation areas will appear natural with little evidence of human changes. Views from other areas on the Forest will include land alternations. Visual quality objectives are established for each management area in the Plan and projects will be designed to meet or exceed these objectives to the extent possible.

Historical and Cultural

Archeological, architectural, ethnological, and historical resources are protected in the Plan. Cultural resource inventories, evaluations, and mitigation measures will be accomplished prior to any activities that may affect cultural resources. The Mokelumne Archeological Special Interest Area is established in recognition of its important cultural resource values.

Budget

The annual budget projected to fully implement the Plan is 17.9 million dollars. This includes 13.7 million dollars of appropriated funds and 4.2 million dollars of nonappropriated monies. Actual budgets will affect the rate of Plan implementation and the outputs produced. The objectives may not be achievable in the projected time frame if, over an extended period, the budget differs significantly from that which is shown to be needed. In that event, a revision or amendment to the Plan may be necessary to achieve overall goals.

II. Description of the Eldorado National Forest

The Forest is located in the central Sierra Nevada. Portions of Alpine, Amador, El Dorado and Placer Counties lie within the Forest boundary. The Forest is bordered by the Stanislaus, Tahoe and Toiyabe National Forests, and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. The west boundary predominantly interfaces private land. Highways 50 and 88 provide trans-Sierra access through the Forest.

The gross area of the Forest is 786,994 acres. This total contains 190,270 acres of other ownership.

The Forest ranges in elevation from 1,000 feet in the foothills to more than 10,000 feet above sea level along the Sierra crest. This mountainous topography is broken by steep canyons of the Mokelumne, Cosumnes, American, and Rubicon rivers. Plateaus of generally moderate relief are located between these steep canyons.

A Mediterranean climate extends over most of the forest, producing warm, dry summers and cold, wet winters. Average annual precipitation varies from 40 to 70 inches. This precipitation falls mainly from October through April. A snowpack from 5-10 feet or more is usually present from December to May at elevations above 6,500 feet.

Principle vegetative types are woodland, chaparral, mixed conifer, true fir, and subalpine. The major commercial forest species are white fir, red fir, ponderosa pine, Jeffrey pine, sugar pine, Douglas-fir, and incense cedar. A wide variety of hardwoods, brush, grasses, and forbs are mixed with each of these forest types.

Water is a major resource. The average acre on the Forest receives about 56 inches of precipitation annually. Average annual runoff is about 29 inches. Surface waters on the Forest are of excellent quality and normally exceed State and Federal water quality standards. There are 102,059 acres of designated wilderness on the Eldorado National Forest.

Of particular importance, is the fact that the Eldorado NF is located in such close proximity to a large number of potential Forest users. The Forest is located within 4 hours driving time of a population in excess of 5 million people. The population of local counties is rapidly expanding as is that of the San Francisco Bay Area, Stockton, and Sacramento where a large number of Forest users originate. The demand for both market and non-market goods and services from the Forest continues to increase along with the population. This increasing demand for a broad mix of resources from a static land base has been a particular concern during development of the Forest Plan.

III. Issues and Alternatives Considered

A. Issues Considered

The scoping process to determine the issues, concerns, and opportunities (ICO's) for the draft Forest Plans was conducted simultaneously for all National Forests in the Pacific Southwest Region between October 1979 and early 1980. Public meetings were held throughout the State and comments were received from individuals, organizations, and governmental agencies. Locally, six meetings were held at communities in and adjacent to the Forest. Public issues and management concerns as a result of these meetings helped define the scope of the EIS (40 CFR 1501.7 and 1508.25).

In Section IV of this Record of Decision, the public issues and concerns on the DEIS and Draft Plan are discussed. The Draft Plan was revised as a result of public comments.

B. Alternatives

In response to planning issues, concerns, legislation, and regulations, a range of alternatives was developed and analyzed in the DEIS. The alternatives emphasize protection of the environmental values unique to the Eldorado National Forest. Each alternative has a different management emphasis resulting in different levels of resource management. The multiple use nature of the alternatives provides a mix of outputs and ensures that no single resource is emphasized to the extent that another resource is excluded. The following alternatives are presented in detail in the FEIS.

Preferred Alternative - A (PRF)

This alternative is the basis of the Plan. The goal of this alternative is to maximize present net value while emphasizing a balance of commodities, visual quality, wilderness, and developed and dispersed recreation. It produces commodities and nonmarket goods and services at or near the 1980 Resources and Planning Act (RPA) target levels.

Current Alternative - B (CUR)

This alternative continues current directions, allocations, policies, and practices into the future. The current mix of market and nonmarket goods and services is provided.

Low Budget Alternative - C (LBU)

Budget reductions of 25 percent from 1982 levels are carried forward in this alternative. Demand for developed recreation and timber are not met.

Eldorado Forest Planning Coalition and Mother Lode Chapter, Sierra Club Alternative - D (CNS)

This alternative was submitted by the Eldorado Forest Planning Coalition and Mother Lode Chapter, Sierra Club between the draft and final EIS. The alternative stresses amenity values over commodity production.

Alliance for the Environment and Resources Alternative - E (AER)

The AER alternative was submitted by the Alliance for the Environment and Resources between the draft and final EIS. This alternative emphasizes high output levels of market re-

sources such as timber, range, minerals, and developed recreation while retaining non-market output levels at economically efficient levels.

Uneven-aged Management Alternative - F (UNM)

This alternative implements a group selection harvest system on all suitable timber lands. Developed and dispersed recreation opportunities continue to increase to meet demand.

Meet Projected Demand Alternative - G (MDM)

An attempt is made in this alternative to simultaneously meet demands for timber, developed recreation, wilderness areas, and a transportation utility corridor. Emphasis is placed on activities to produce these goods and services.

C. Public Participation

The Eldorado National Forest conducted an active public involvement program. Federal, State, and local agencies have been informed and consulted through the planning effort. Forest users have had an opportunity to participate.

A Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for the Plan was published in the Federal Register in October 1979. A Notice of Availability of the DEIS and proposed Plan was published in the Federal Register on August 29, 1986 and announced by area news media. Approximately 800 copies of the DEIS and proposed Plan were distributed to the public. Meetings and public hearings were held during the comment period, which lasted through January 10, 1987. Over 2,400 individuals; organizations; and Federal, State, and local agencies commented on the proposed Plan and DEIS. All comments were considered in the preparation of the final document and in the selection of Alternative A as the Plan. Appendix N in the FEIS lists those responding to the proposed Plan and DEIS, and shows the Eldorado National Forest response to the public comments.

IV. Rationale for the Decision

In selecting Alternative A, I considered both monetary and non-monetary cost and benefits, the capability of the land, the need for protection of resources, concerns expressed by persons interested in the Forest, advice received from other agencies and resource professionals and the legislative mandate of the Forest Service. Therefore, national, regional, state, and local objectives were considered in making the decision.

Alternative A provides management direction that will result in the greatest overall net public benefit, including the benefits of a healthy, diverse, and productive forest environment. It provides a mix of amenity and commodity resources at reasonable levels and addresses the range of public concerns more effectively than the other alternatives.

Alternatives B (CUR), E (AER), and G (MDM) do not contribute significantly to expressed demand for non-market resources such as special areas, RNA's, older and overmature seral stages for wildlife habitat, visual, wilderness and wild and scenic rivers. Commodity outputs in Alternatives C (LBU), D (CNS), and F (UNM) are provided at levels below that needed for local and regional industries and businesses.

A. Response to Public Comments and Management Concerns

The FEIS,including Alternative A, responds to comments received from the public on the DEIS and proposed plan. Public input was very helpful. It showed areas of confusion, disagreements, and also those portions of the Plan that the public accepted. The comments proposed changes that would correct the documents, indicated where better explanations were needed for clear understanding, and stated issues to be addressed further. Often comments from one reviewer conflicted with comments from another reviewer.

Major issues and areas of public interest that surfaced during the public comment period are discussed below.

Mokelumne Archeological Special Interest Area (SIA)

The public was divided on designation of this area as an SIA. Those favoring designation cited the need to protect the cultural and archeological values. The opposing viewpoint was that the values were already protected by law and an SIA designation would preclude other management options. The proposed Plan called for only unregulated timber harvest from the area.

Current direction in the Plan proposes SIA designation for the area. Timber harvest will be part of the regulated quantity. The area will be managed as a non-interchangeable component (NIC) of the timber base. If the potential ASQ is not available due to protection of archaeological values, the volume will be reduced. The decision to harvest or not to harvest will be made in a site-specific analysis.

Hardwood Management (Woodlands)

Responses on this issue varied from "cut no oaks" to the idea that a standard for retention of oaks was unnecessary because there are plenty of oaks. Existing direction called for retention of 15 square feet of basal area per acre on south facing slopes in critical deer winter range and 5 square feet per acre basal area elsewhere on the Forest. The DEIS and proposed Plan called for 80-120 square feet of basal area per acre on south facing slopes in critical deer winter range and varied between 5 and 80 square feet of basal area per acre elsewhere. Additional

analysis has shown that very few acres exist or have the potential within the foreseeable future to have 80-120 square feet of basal area per acre. This would represent full stocking of oak on each acre.

The standards in the Plan have been revised to retain a basal area of 36 square feet per acre where it exists in critical deer winter range and holding areas and 10 square feet per acre elsewhere. There is no anticipated reduction in ASQ with this change.

Caples Creek Further Planning Area

This issue involved whether the 17,340 acre Caples Creek area should be managed as wilderness, semiprimitive nonmotorized, semiprimitive motorized or given some general forest emphasis. The majority of responses favored either wilderness designation or continuance of semiprimitive motorized management, which would allow continued use of motorized and mechanized vehicles in the area. Semiprimitive nonmotorized management was proposed for a majority of the area in the DEIS and proposed Plan.

The Plan recommends wilderness designation for 13,694 acres of the Further Planning Area. The remainder of the area will be managed as general forest. This allows for use of some of the most popular ORV routes in the area and timber management on the majority of suitable acres. Some 2-wheel drive trails within the area recommended for Wilderness will be eliminated during Plan implementation if the area is designated.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

This issue was whether segments of the following four rivers should be recommended for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System: Rubicon, North Fork Cosumnes, Middle Fork Cosumnes, and North Fork Mokelumne (above Salt Springs Reservoir). The proposed Plan and DEIS recommended all four rivers for inclusion. Some public response supported designation of all the named rivers and also requested study of other rivers. Opposition to designation cited jeopardizing needed domestic water supplies and adverse impacts on timber production.

The Plan has been revised to recommend only the Rubicon River for designation as a Scenic River. The final decision regarding recommendation for the North Fork of the Mokelumne (above Salt Springs Reservoir) as a wild, scenic or recreation river will be made within the Stanislaus NF Plan. The North Fork of the Mokelumne (below Salt Springs Reservoir) has been determined to be "eligible" for inclusion in the national wild, scenic and recreation river system and a suitability study will be prepared early in the Plan period. The North and Middle Forks of the Cosumnes will be managed with a Streamside Management Zone prescription which emphasizes water quality and riparian dependent resources while providing for other uses which are compatible with these. As such they remain available for water supply development while their riparian values are protected.

Visual Management

The degree of retention of natural appearing landscape/scenery along travel routes and around areas of concentrated public use was the basic visual management issue. Public response varied between visual protection only on Highway 88 and Highway 50 and full visual protection of all travel routes. The draft Plan and DEIS proposed meeting visual quality objectives in all sensitivity level one and two viewsheds of the Forest and leaving areas of concentrated use in a near natural condition.

The Plan retains the direction from the draft documents. The tradeoffs associated with high visual protection are justified by the significant visual values being protected.

Silvicultural Systems

Although the public response generally favored some form of timber harvest, the issue concerned the type of silviculture system applied. A wide range of silviculture systems was discussed in the public response. There was significant opposition to clearcutting. The existing Timber Management Plan provides for harvest with predominantly even-aged management, primarily with clearcutting. The proposed Plan provided for both even-aged and uneven-aged systems with even-aged management being predominant.

The Plan provides for approximately 23.4 million board feet (MMBF) of timber harvest from regulated stands with uneven-aged systems which is a 75% increase in volumes from these systems over that in the Draft Plan. Even-aged systems will provide approximately 113.8 MMBF of the allowable sale quantity. This is a reduction in volume of approximately 9% from even-aged systems as proposed in the draft Plan.

Timber

Public response varied widely on the issue of how much timber should be harvested from the Eldorado National Forest. A significant number of respondents requested that no reduction be made from the levels of harvest proposed in the existing Timber Management Plan. Some respondents requested either an increase or a decrease from past levels. The existing Timber Management Plan provided for a timber sale program of 138.3 MMBf from regulated stands plus allowed for the potential for 5 MMBF from unregulated stands. The draft Plan called for a 138.4 MMBF allowable sale quantity and accomodated the additional potential of 18.5 MMBF of unregulated harvest.

Changes in volumes in the Plan were not made based on *this* issue alone. Changes did occur based on the resolution of other resource issues such as spotted owls, riparian, hardwoods, and visual management. The Final Plan provides for an allowable sale quantity of 137.2 MMBF. The Plan also allows for the potential of an additional unregulated harvest volume of 9.3 MMBF which may be sold.

To meet any significant increase in future timber demand, a different land allocation would be necessary. This would require an amendment or revision of the Plan to select another alternative.

Riparian

Two areas of concern were expressed in the public response. One concern was that the Streamside Management Zones (SMZ) were too large and management should be for the riparian areas only. The other was a concern for potential adverse effects of logging and grazing on the riparian. The proposed Plan provided for harvesting approximately 5 percent of the inventory within the SMZ per decade. It also provided for an approximate 30 percent increase in grazing on the Forest.

The expectation of timber yields from the SMZ has been modified to approximately 1 percent per decade in the Plan. Grazing outputs will not increase in the Plan and standards and guidelines are included to minimize damage from grazing.

Livestock Grazing

Many respondents felt that too much emphasis was being placed on grazing, especially in relation to perceived conflicts with riparian areas. A number of responses questioned the proposed increase in grazing when costs of administering the program exceed the return to Treasury. The proposed Plan called for an approximate 30 percent increase in animal unit months (AUM's) of grazing over current levels and provided for intensive meadow management to achieve an increase in grazing.

The Plan provides for no increase of grazing above current levels of approximately 13,800 AUM's. Meadow management will continue as a practice but not with the objective of increasing AUM's. Emphasis in meadows will be on water and wildlife. Livestock grazing will continue to occur in meadows and will be managed to minimize conflicts with other resource values.

Spotted Owls

Public comment on the number and size of spotted owl habitat areas (SOHA's) predominantly favored the opposite ends of the spectrum, maintaining only the number of designated habitat areas needed to meet Regional Guidelines for maintaining a viable population (29 SOHA's) or the maximum number recorded (84 SOHA's). The draft Plan called for management of 46 SOHA's and included timber harvest as an activity within the SOHA.

The Plan manages for 32 SOHA's with a mix of management prescriptions. A prescription that provides for no scheduled timber harvest will be applied on 24 of the SOHA's. Activities within the 1,000 acres of suitable habitat and 650 acres of replacement habitat will be limited to those compatible with spotted owl objectives. The other eight SOHA's will be managed with a prescription providing for timber harvest. These areas will be noninterchangeable components (NIC's) of the timber sale program. If the potential ASQ is not available due to spotted owl habitat needs, the volume harvested will be reduced.

The change in number of SOHAs between the draft and final Plan reflects response to public input, incorporation of updated information on the location of owl pairs, combination of some of the previous areas into more manageable units, and helps to ensure appropriate distribution to maintain interaction among pairs through their range.

To the extent possible, while still providing for the needs of spotted owl viability, habitat areas were designed to have the least impact possible on other resource programs such as timber.

Off-Road Vehicles

Public comments were generally polarized for or against off-road vehicle use on the Forest. ORV proponents' comments were primarily to maintain what trails are left, "don't eliminate any more", and to increase opportunities with emphasis on a high country experience. ORV opponent responses ranged from elimination of ORV use on National Forest lands to restriction of use to trails only.

The proposed Plan maintained the existing direction with an ORV trail system and with a significant portion of the Forest "open" to ORV use outside of trails. The proposed Plan closed several existing trails in the High Country management area where semiprimitive nonmotorized use was to be emphasized.

The Plan changes the existing ORV management direction, with a majority of the Forest open for ORV use, to direction restricting ORV use to designated roads and trails on a majority of

the Forest. Some specific open area may remain but acres designated as "open" will be significantly reduced. Designation of open areas will be based on subsequent site specific environmental analysis. A Forest ORV Plan will be completed, by January 1990, to implement the general direction from the Forest Plan and to display the existing system and determine future routes to be developed. Prior to completion of the new Forest ORV Plan, the existing ORV Plan will remain in effect with some specific area closures instituted in order to implement management objectives from the Forest Plan.

High Country Management

This issue revolved around whether additional acres should have been proposed for High Country, which emphasizes a range of recreation opportunities and experiences, and whether further restrictions should be placed on High Country activities such as not allowing for salvage of insect damaged or diseased timber. Some questioned whether the High Country emphasis zone is even an appropriate management scheme. Those opposing the designation felt it was too restrictive, especially in limiting timber harvest to sanitation and salvage. The proposed Plan suggested 67,876 acres of High Country.

The Plan maintains the High Country management areas with acreage changes. There are now 58,538 acres with High Country emphasis. Some acres previously in these management areas are now in the Caples Creek Wilderness recommendation and others have been added along the western boundary of Desolation Wilderness. The range of activities allowed within the High Country remains as proposed in the draft Plan.

Monoculture

Many public responses expressed a strong feeling that new plantations should be planted with a "natural" mixture of conifer seedlings. Also, maintenance of hardwoods, shrubs, and various forbs within plantations was requested to meet wildlife needs.

The Plan has been revised to reflect a diversity of conifer species to be planted and the anticipation of some competing shrubs, forbs, and hardwoods existing, even after release treatments are applied.

Additional specific concerns of the public are addressed in the public response appendix.

B. Economic Efficiency of Alternatives

In determining the most economically efficient alternative, the Forest Service uses an estimate of Present Net Value (PNV), which is the difference between discounted benefits and costs. Alternative A ranked third in PNV among alternatives considered in detail, but it provides the best mix of resource activities and is more compatible with the Forest Service goals and objectives than the other alternatives.

The highest PNV was produced by the Economic Efficiency Alternative. The Alliance for the Environment and Resources Alternative and the Current Alternative also has a higher PNV than Alternative A. Each of these alternatives provided for higher timber harvest levels, which contributed significantly to the higher PNV.

The PNV in Alternative A is approximately 9 percent below that of the Economic Efficiency Alternative. This reduction in PNV was judged less important in terms of net public benefit than the non-priced benefits, such as visual quality and wildlife habitat, associated with Alternative A.

C. Contribution to the Regional Production of Goods and Services

The Forest Plan will serve to implement and adjust assigned output targets of the RPA (Resources Planning Act) program. In considering the balance of multiple uses, I have chosen levels for each that is most fitting to the needs of the area. Although the Plan does not achieve some of the targets established in the 1980 RPA program, it does continue to provide resources important to the nation while preserving the basic soil and water resources so critical to the environment. While some alternatives provide higher commodity outputs, the costs of doing so are also high, both in direct costs of implementation and costs to offset potential adverse impacts.

D. Social and Economic Stability

Factors such as jobs, revenues, recreational opportunities, impacts upon lifestyles in the area, benefits to the local economy, protection of resources for future generations, and implications on social and economic stability were considered in choosing the preferred alternative.

The major effects of the Plan include increased earnings and employment in the area and revenues to the four County governments. Compared to the existing situation, significant increases in employment (approximately 21 percent) and income (approximately 18 percent) are projected. Forest receipts, of which 25 percent are distributed to the Counties, are projected to increase substantially through the period of the Plan.

The economic characteristics and impacts described above have social implications as well. To the extent that local communities can maintain or enhance their economic base over time determines to a large extent whether the communities remain stable as social systems. The management activities called for in the Plan help maintain local social stability by contributing to economic activity. In providing work and recreational and educational experiences for the community, the Eldorado National Forest follows a policy of non-discrimination and will promote active participation by all segments of the public. The Forest will follow affirmative action principles in all of its direct hiring and contracting activities.

E. Environmental Effects of the Alternatives

This section summarizes some effects that are expected to occur under each alternative. The magnitude, timing, and location of key environmental effects will differ under each alternative. These factors were all considered in choosing Alternative A as the Forest Plan.

In all alternatives, visual quality will decline over the next 5 decades as actual conditions approach the Visual Quality Objectives of the alternatives. This reduction results primarily from timber harvest activities. The CNS Alternative results in the least visual impact; the Uneven-aged Alternative is second. Both of these alternatives rely heavily on uneven-aged silviculture systems, which have less visual impacts. Alternative A has the least impact of the alternatives that have more reliance on even-aged silviculture systems.

All alternatives protect riparian areas and all except the Low Budget Alternative increase protection with the addition of Streamside Management Zones (SMZ) beyond the riparian area. No timber harvest would occur in the riparian and SMZ under Alternative D. Alternative A calls for removal of approximately 1 percent of timber volume per decade while protecting riparian areas. All other alternatives provide for removal of 5 percent of timber volume per decade. The potential for impacts would be least in Alternative A and D, which have only minor harvest levels or no harvest in riparian areas.

Under Alternative A the prescribed fire program will average about 7,100 acres annually. Fire will be used to prepare timber harvest areas for reforestation, to reduce concentrations of hazardous forest fuels, and to improve wildlife habitat and range forage. The long-term benefits include less damage to soil productivity and water quality through reduction in wildfire acres. Short-term losses include temporary deterioration of air quality and temporary impacts on visual resources. Prescribed fire acres range from 3,100 acres to 7,100 acres for all alternatives considered in detail. The Low Budget Alternative has the least area treated with prescribed fire.

I recognize that Alternative A, or any of the alternatives, could produce some short-term adverse environmental consequences such as a slight reduction in air quality; visual quality reduction due to clearcutting and road construction; and sediment yields due to vegetation management activities. These consequences will be monitored, as discussed in Chapter 5 of the Plan, to ensure compliance with Forest management direction and applicable laws and regulations.

F. Environmentally Preferable Alternative

I judge the CNS Alternative to be the environmentally preferred alternative. It emphasizes protection of water, air and visual quality; enhances wildlife habitat; and maintains the undeveloped condition of wilderness and roadless areas. Nonmarket resources receive high priority. Wide Streamside Management Zones protect riparian dependent resources. All spotted owl habitat areas are protected into the future. All Special Interest Areas, RNA's, and eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers are recommended. Timber harvest is accomplished primarily with uneven-aged systems and no herbicides are used.

The CNS Alternative was not selected for implementation because, in my judgment, it does not provide a program balanced to meet the needs of all the public. Proposed silvicultural systems provide a significantly reduced harvest level (approximately 35% from existing planned levels). Also, I believe it does not respond to the Forest Service multiple-use responsibilities as well as Alternative A.

G. Compatibility with Other Agency Goals and Plans

The goals and plans of other agencies were considered throughout the planning process. The FEIS and Plan reflect this consideration along with the comments received from public agencies during the public review period. The Plan is compatible with other agency goals and plans.

Federal agencies commenting on the Plan included Bureau of Land Management, Department of Interior (F&WL Service), Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Commerce (NOAA), and Department of Interior (Env. Project Review). State agencies included the Departments of Fish and Game, Forestry, Transportation, Water Resources, Central Valley Region of California Regional Water Quality Control Board, and Department of Justice. Local governments and agencies commenting included El Dorado, Amador, Alpine, Placer, Sutter, and Yuba Counties; Alpine County Planning Commission; Bi-County Economic Development Commission; City of Yuba City; Cosumnes River Water and Power Authority; El Dorado County Fish and Game Commission; El Dorado Irrigation District; Georgetown Fire District; Pine Grove Community Services District; and Yuba-Sutter Chamber of Commerce.

Public input to the Plan provided much needed information and it solidified coordination efforts. Dialogue with other Federal agencies, States, local governments, and interested publics will continue during Plan implementation. Ongoing involvement by interested parties is critical to successful implementation. As more site-specific planning is done, we will continue to involve the public as we conduct additional environmental analysis.

H. Reasons for Selecting the Plan

Alternative A provides the best mix of resource management activities considered appropriate for existing conditions or those that are predicted to be needed during this ten to fifteen year planning period. It allows increased utilization of some market resources while protecting the basic soil and water resources and maintaining or enhancing amenity values. It provides for increases in recreation opportunities, including significant trail construction and a wilderness recommendation for the Caples Creek area. Vegetative diversity is enhanced, which also benefits wildlife. It protects riparian areas, restores disturbed watersheds, increases water quality and quantity, and maintains soil productivity.

Alternative A best meets people's needs as identified by the entire public involvement process including responses to the Draft Plan and Environmental Impact Statement; resource needs as identified by resource professionals; and National Forest management mandates as identified in the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the National Forest Management Act of 1976, and their accompanying regulations.

Alternative A provides a balance between the environmentally preferred alternative and the most economically efficient alternatives. Although resource development and use provided by Alternative A has the potential to cause more impact on the natural environment than the CNS Alternative, Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines and Management Prescriptions will ensure that the natural environment is protected.

I judge Alternative A to have the greatest long-term public benefit when compared to other alternatives and have selected it to be the Plan for management of the Eldorado National Forest.

V. Implementation, Mitigation, and Monitoring

The Plan will not be implemented sooner than 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Plan, FEIS, and Record of Decision appears in the *Federal Register*. The time needed to bring all activities into compliance with the Plan will vary depending on the type of project.

As soon as practicable after approval of the Plan, the Forest Supervisor shall ensure that, subject to valid existing rights, all outstanding and future permits, contracts, cooperative agreements and other instruments for occupancy and use of affected lands are consistent with the Plan. The Forest Supervisor will also assure that (1) Forest proposed annual programs and projects, objectives, and budget requests are consistent with overall management direction specified in the Plan; and (2) implementation is in compliance with the Regional Guide and 36 CFR 219.10(e), .11(d), and .27.

Implementation will be guided by the management requirements contained in the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, prescriptions, and management area direction found in Chapter 4 of the Plan. These management requirements were developed through an interdisciplinary effort and contain measures necessary to mitigate or eliminate any long-term adverse effects. To the best of my knowledge, all practical mitigation measures have been adopted.

Outputs associated with Plan implementation may be adjusted as a result of research efforts that produce new information and technologies. Air quality, prescribed fire, riparian trend studies, and other data will enhance and affect plan implementation. Management direction contained in the Plan will be used to analyze any proposal involving use of the Eldorado National Forest.

The purpose of the monitoring program is to evaluate whether Forest goals and objectives are being met, to determine how closely management requirements have been followed, to assist in assessing achievement of the environmental thresholds, and to determine when Plan amendments and revisions are needed. The results of monitoring and evaluation will be used to measure the progress of Plan implementation. These results will also help to determine when Plan amendments or revisions are needed.

VI. Planning Records, Revisions and Amendments, and Administrative Review

A. Planning Records

Planning records contain detailed information and document decisions used in developing the Plan and FEIS as required in 36 CFR 219.12. All of the documentation detailing the Forest planning process is available for inspection during regular business hours at:

Forest Supervisor's Office
Eldorado National Forest
100 Forni Road
Placerville, California 95667

These records are incorporated by reference into the FEIS and Plan.

B. Revisions and Amendments

The National Forest Management Act requires revision of the Forest Plan at least every 15 years. The Plan may be revised sooner whenever the Forest Supervisor determines that conditions or demands in the area covered by the Plan have changed significantly, or when changes in national policies, goals, or objectives would have a significant effect on programs of the Eldorado National Forest. All procedures set forth in 36 CFR 219.12 will be followed; this includes scoping, an analysis of the management situation, formulation of alternatives, and estimation of effects, an evaluation of alternatives, indentification of a preferred alternative, documentation in an EIS and draft plan, and formal public comment before approval and implementation of the revised plan.

The Regional Forester approves any significant amendments to this Plan while the Forest Supervisor has the authority to approve non-significant amendments. The determination of significance or non-significance will be documented in a decision notice. No changes will be implemented prior to appropriate public notice. Determinations of significance or non-significance are appealable under 36 CFR 211.18.

C. Right To Administrative Review

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be in writing and submitted to:

Paul F. Barker
Regional Forester
Pacific Southwest Region
USDA, Forest Service
630 Sansome Street
San Francisco, CA 94111

The notice of appeal, a statement of reasons to support the appeal, and any request for oral presentation must be filed within 45 days after the date of this decision.

My recommendation for Wilderness designation of the Caples Creek area, Research Natural Area designation for Peavine and Station Creek, and Wild and Scenic River Status for the Rubicon River are not appealable.

The Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River recommendations are subject to further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. Final decisions on recommendations for designation have been reserved by the Congress to itself. Specific decisions regarding interim management of these areas pending a final decision or action by Congress are appealable.

The Chief decides on Research Natural Area (RNA) establishment. Therefore, my recommendation is not appealable. Specific decisions regarding interim management of RNAs pending a final decision by the Chief are appealable.

An appeal of my decision does not halt Forest Plan implementation. A stay of the decision must be requested. A stay may be requested at any time during the appeal period until a decision on the appeal is made by the Chief, USDA Forest Service. No decisions on site-specific projects are made in this document, although a number of projects are identified. Those projects identified in various parts of the Plan or FEIS are only included in order to show that Forest Plan goals and objectives can be achieved.

Final decisions on site-specific projects will be made during Plan implementation after appropriate analysis and documentation has met NEPA requirements. Parties dissatisfied with a specific project should appeal the site-specific decision once it is made.

Paul F. Barker JAN 6 - 1989

PAUL F. BARKER
Regional Forester

Date